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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002773

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: MELKITES DENIED PERMISSION TO BUILD CHURCH

REF: A. KUWAIT 1135
[1](#)B. 05 KUWAIT 4590

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) On July 8, the Technical Committee of the Municipal Council officially denied the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church's request for land on which to build a new church. Committee chairman Majid Al-Mutairi told Church representative Pier Maloof that the Committee had refused the application because of concerns that the new church would generate too much traffic. Maloof dismissed this as an excuse to cover up the religious reasons behind the decision. Maloof and the Church's leader, Father Boutros Gharib, expressed frustration to PolOff but vowed to keep pursuing the matter.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) The decision, which is the Municipal Council's final word on the matter, comes after months of the Church's lobbying the Technical Committee to reverse a March 20 decision by the Municipal Council. The Church had enlisted the help of Shaykha Fariha, the Amir's half-sister and the Crown Prince's full-sister, in its effort to gain land for the new church. There were many raised and dashed hopes along the way, including a dinner the Church held on June 6 in Shaykha Fariha's honor, at which she declared that the Church would get its land within a week or two.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Gharib said the Church would work to arrange a meeting with Crown Prince Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmad to address the matter. He then asked PolOff's advice about whether he should give a critical interview about the matter to the local press. PolOff reminded Gharib that such an interview could be counterproductive in that it might stir very religiously conservative elements to make an uproar (ref A). Gharib agreed it might not be prudent and seemed to think it might be better to pursue the meeting with the Crown Prince, Prime Minister, or Amir first.

Municipal Council Member Says Decision Based on Religion

[1](#)4. (C/NF) PolOff contacted Khalid Abdulrazzaq Al-Khalid, a liberal Municipal Council member, to ask about the reasons behind the decision. "Do you want to know the truth? It's because it's a church." said Al-Khalid. Al-Khalid described the technical reasons given as excuses to hide the truth. Al-Khalid said that the Islamist head of the Technical Committee, Majid Al-Mutairi, was set against granting the land but had used bureaucratic tactics to delay a vote on the issue for several months because he knew that the Prime Minister and even the Amir were in favor of the Church getting the land. Al-Khalid took over the Technical Committee while Al-Mutairi was on vacation and put the Church issue on the agenda. Al-Khalid noted that some of the members of the Technical Committee were opposed to the

proposal for religious reasons and that others were too scared to make a vote favoring Christians for fear that the issue would be exploited by Islamists to defeat them in the next Municipal Council elections (scheduled for 2009). He stated that the Municipal Council would never approve the land grant and advised any concerned parties to take up the matter with the Prime Minister.

Church Still Has a Chance

15. (C/NF) The Church's request has gone through a long process. In October 2005, Shaykha Fariha told the Church it had gotten GOK approval for the land, though it is unclear on what authority she thought she was basing her pronouncement (ref B). The Municipal Council rejected the plan and suggested that the Church submit a proposal for a drastically smaller piece of land, though this was probably more of a stalling tactic than a suggestion of something the Council might actually approve. The Church refused the proposal and asked the Council for a more suitable piece of land. The Municipal Council initially denied the request on March 20 (ref A). The Minister for Municipal Affairs rejected their decision, possibly under pressure from Shaykha Fariha. This forced the issue back to the Municipal Council's Technical Committee for review. The Technical Committee's upholding of the Municipal Council's original decision means that there is now an unresolvable disagreement between the two bodies that control Kuwait's municipal affairs (i.e. the Municipal Council and the Ministry for Municipal Affairs). The Council of Ministers has the authority to adjudicate such disputes.

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